

Humanitarian aid supplies ease health problems in Kirkuk

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More than 71,000 pounds of medical relief supplies landed at Kirkuk Military Airfield in Iraq recently as part of a joint effort between the soldiers of the 173d Airborne Brigade and the humanitarian organization, AmeriCare.

Another 35,000 pounds of relief supplies had arrived earlier in the city by truck according to AmeriCare Humanitarian Programs director, Aimee Gilbert.

“AmeriCare did an assessment in conjunction with the local authorities of what was needed and what would best benefit Kirkuk,” said 1st Lt. John Evans, 404th Civil Affairs Battalion, attached to the 173d Abn Bde. “They came up with a list of 71,000 pounds of supplies, antibiotics, aspirin, Tylenol™, etc. They came to our office last week and, together, we coordinated the flight.”

“The situation here is quickly turning into one of chronic needs—of infrastructure support. They [the Iraqi health care system] have stores of medicine here but the doctors tell us it’s only enough to last for the next two to four weeks. These new supplies should help alleviate that resource gap until their system is back in place,” Gilbert said.

“We’re hoping to avoid a bad news story here,” she continued. “We spoke to the doctors and they told us what supplies were most depleted and was most needed.”

Getting the supplies flown into Kirkuk is a major accomplishment, according to both Lt. John Col. Scott, 173d Civil Affairs medical liaison officer and Gilbert. Besides United Nations relief efforts, the flight that landed here is one of only two such flights of its kind to land in Iraq since the war. The other flight, according to Gilbert, landed in Baghdad a week ago.

“AmeriCare has been pushing to bring relief flights into Kirkuk for some time,” said Scott. “But because of security concerns, we had to say no. We are finally able to do so.

“It took some effort, on AmeriCare’s part, to get the clearance through our central command to get this flight in. Right now, there is no established program to bring these flights in. Each flight requires very detailed clearance, especially those carrying medical supplies,” he explained pointing to a large stack of inventory sheets listing the plane’s contents.

“It’s quite complicated to make something like this happen,” Scott said.

“This isn’t like other relief operations that we’ve done,” Gilbert said. “At first we expected a refugee population at the Turkish border. We were expecting that and were sending supplies to that region. That never materialized. Now we’re focused on moving them down here.”